

## Immediacy and remembrance

by EARL F. PALMER

I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT the importance of tradition and traditions, which naturally brings up the meaning of past tense/present tense. We all know that one present tense marker of today is an atmosphere of emergence and immediacy because of the possibilities of instant and universal communication. The new letter-writing for many is texting, voice messages and sometimes Facebook or Twitter.

One result of immediacy is that we are able to collect our thoughts quickly as well as the information and thoughts of others. But when an actual moment of deciding about one pathway or another confronts me and those around me, we hesitate, even stumble in deciding about where to put our feet down and what way to go. When that moment happens, we realize that we need more than contemporary skills of immediacy. We need more complete clearheadedness skills.

First-century writer/pastor St. Paul has help for us in a letter he wrote to Christians at Philippi. At the start of that letter, he prays to the Living Lord for his friends, and his concern is decidedly present tense: "That your love may overflow here and now with the good fruit of righteousness" (Phil. 1:3-11). Paul then prays that they will think clearly: "With knowledge and full insight to determine what is best ... ." He uses three words to describe this clearheadedness: the first is *epiginosku* (gnosis) the word is intensified with the prefix *epi*, which means "knowledge in every direction," past and present. For Paul there are no advantages to ignorance whether of the past (history) or the present (computer science). Everything we learn is a skill we need at each moment of deciding. His second word is *eisthesid* (into thesis). This is the insight word that describes a knowing that seeks out the deeper meanings. It also is a skill of past and present discoveries combined. The third word is sometimes translated "discernment." It is *diaphe-ro*, which in ordinary Greek usage means *common sense*, a skill for the roadway. Paul prays that his friends learn the competence of being streetwise. Put together, these "knowing" words make up the architecture of wisdom.

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WITH GRATITUDE,  
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OUR LIVES."**

One more word ties the prayer together, and that word is a past tense/present tense word. It is the word *remember*. He begins the whole prayer with that word. We are to remember each other with gratitude, and best of all to remember that Jesus Christ is at work in our lives. "He who began a good work in the whole journey of our lives will continue

Paul has helped me answer the question of the continuity of tradition, which is the intentional memory of the learning and discovery of earlier people of faith, and added to that the value of immediacy. I need both in every part of my life: in relationships, in the finding of pathways and in worship, faithful to the Living Lord. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

I remembered these words recently when my wife, Shirley, and I, en route to a travel adventure where I was to speak, stopped to visit the first Christian Church in the Americas, completed in 1540 A.D. I found the Greek letters Chi Rho (XP) and Alpha and Omega (AO), meaning Jesus Christ, beginning and end. These signs of Christ were in the Cathedral de Santa Maria La Menor, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

I realized again that ancient markers of Christ's eternal durability are also contemporary markers of relevance. The one who is the living center of Christian faith, hope and love knows how to meet us here and now, just as he met our fathers and mothers in past generations. It may happen that today's experiences of God's faithfulness will become tomorrow's traditions.

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